

Thai Reporters Visit A Cambodian Town As Ministers Meet

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POIPET, Cambodia, Nov. 17 (AP)—Thai journalists had a brief look today at a Cambodian border town empty of people and scarred by fire.

The visit came as Thailand's Foreign Minister, Chatichai Choonhavan crossed a narrow wooden bridge to meet with Ieng Sary, Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia, in friendly talks aimed at normalizing relations between the neighboring countries.

Journalists including several Westerners, were allowed to cross the simple metal span separating Thailand and Cambodia's westernmost town. Mr. Chatichai was met and embraced by Mr. Ieng Sary, who drove up in a Dodge van.

Cambodian soldiers dressed in baggy green uniforms with checked scarves, their trademark, watched the visitors warily but did not move to restrain them as long as they stayed near the frontier.

Cambodian officials arrived with an invitation from Mr. Ieng Sary to Thai reporters to dine in the village of Poipet. Westerners were not allowed to join them.

An interpreter working for The Associated Press reported much of Poipet in ashes—the result of a nighttime fire some months ago—and about 60 soldiers in the town. No civilians were seen.

All shops remained closed. Their proprietors and all other civilians, according to one soldier, had been conscripted to plant rice in the countryside.

The visitors were taken to a restaurant for a meal of fried chicken, duck soup, oranges and Cambodian whisky. Soldiers dressed in white served the meal, which preceded a brief news conference at which Mr. Ieng Sary said the border would reopen "soon," perhaps in a matter of weeks.

Visitors saw only two cars, the van and an American-made ambulance jeep in spanking new condition.

Cambodian soldiers answered most questions with, "I don't know." They smiled occasionally and spoke rarely.

One soldier, asked if she was married, replied that "high authorities" discouraged weddings in Cambodia because of a shortage of food and the need to work hard.